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ABSTRACT

Storytelling has long been a part of our culture, and teachers should recognize its value as a pedagogical tool. The Word Weaving program, an experimental storytelling program, includes folk tales, literary tales, adaptations, and original and true stories from the teller. In it, all stories are simply told to a class without a book in evidence. Because experience with Word Weaving techniques had suggested that storytelling provides several benefits to students, a study was conducted to investigate and document the effects of a full-year Word Weaving program. Subjects were two groups of 13 primary grade students, one control and one experimental. Teachers of the experimental group were trained in and used Word Weaving techniques. Identical procedures involving students retelling a story and then creating a new story based on it were used first in October then again in May. Four measures of language usage were obtained: fluency, vocabulary, descriptive langauge, and recall. Results indicated that although the two groups were equally fluent at first, by the end of the year, the experimental group told longer stories than they did earlier and also significantly outperformed the control group. Although the retelling data showed no significant differences between the experimental and control groups on any of the dependent variables, the experimental group did show greater gains on all the measures. Teachers also unanimously attested to storytelling's benefits. (Tables of results and suggestions for future research are included.) (JL)

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EFFECTS OF STORYTELLING

An Ancient Art for Modern Classrooms

A Study by
Catharine Horne Farrell
Denise D. Nessel

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Word Weaving
A Storytelling Project of the Zellerbach Family Fund
and the San Francisco Education Fund

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"In the High and Far Off Times
the Elephant, O Best Beloved,
had no trunk."

From "The Elephant's Child,"
Just So Stories, Rudyard Kipling

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Storytelling As Living Art

There was once a time when the spoken word carried the truth of all that was known. All that was told by word of mouth was all there was to know. Those who remembered the most and intoned the memories of the people were ritual storytellers. They told the history, they spoke the wisdom, they knew the tales of the great spirits and the small animals. The storytellers taught and interpreted life for their people (Sawyer, 1962).

Of course, the interpretation found in their stories was not simple fact and commentary. It was a free flow of idea and symbol, of incident and art, with the power to amaze, baffle, inspire and instruct. The centuries-old stories, primitive and abstract, operate in the world of mental images or painted metaphor, those constructs of the mind most primary and most clearly evocative (Bettelheim, 1975). As such, storytelling is as ancient an art as human speech itself, and the function of "story" to the human mind is as natural as words to the human voice. Possibly the most compelling proof that storytelling or the oral tradition is basic to human culture is that it is still, incredibly, a living art.

As we brush off the archaeological dust from our study of storytelling, we find it a continuous tradition; hurtling through time on Earth towards the twenty-first century, storytellers abound and their art is in revival. Is this a curiosity, a quaint anachronism that makes sense only in the light of mass media, a depersonalized society, an accelerated technology? Whether the current, cultural phenomenon of storytelling revival (Weyler, 1980; Manuel, 1981) represents nostalgia (Maddocks, 1981), or a basic emotional need, is not the subject of this paper. Why people—from early childhood to old age—yearn to hear the truths spoken and passed down with the intimate and immediate contact of the storyteller's art is a topic for sociologists and psychologists to pursue.

This paper, instead, aims to review and examine the educational value of storytelling for children at the primary level. Children love to hear stories. Even the present generation of youngsters, exposed to movies and television's fast-paced special effects, become captivated by storytime.

Yet storytelling has no special effects; it is an embarrassment of simplicity. As a dramatic event, it consists of the teller standing or sitting in front of the group and talking. There are no book illustrations, no filmstrips, no visuals at all.

One might think the modern child would become utterly bored. But as students become familiar with storytelling, they develop a fascination for it, asking for certain stories to be told again and again. Once introduced to a classroom storytime, children bring books from home and want to share their favorites with the class. Often they want to tell stories to one another spontaneously and will deliver an impromptu version of "The Three Bears" not to be found in any existing folklore collection (Farrell, 1981).

Though children delight in stories, classroom storytelling has a ragtag reputation among school teachers. Some feel telling a story to the class is frivolous, a treat, even silly. Yet teachers who learn to become storytellers find they enjoy themselves and their classes in a new way. There is no doubt storytime is fun for both the listeners and the teller. In fact, a surefire way to win the hearts of a group of children is to tell them stories. They will welcome you with applause, exclamations and enthusiastic hugs. Somehow, magically, you will have become part of their world and have walked the long bridge between teacher and student, adult and child.

To a rational, professional adult, a story's content frequently seems "silly." But just as the earliest cultures in human evolution used stories to interpret the world in metaphor, so do children who are not yet able to use rational and explicit analysis (Bettelheim, 1975). Because storytelling retells and symbolically interprets the simple incidents of life, it seems to fulfill a basic language function for the young child. When you tell a story, you are speaking their language.

In the highly acclaimed work in the teaching of language skills, *A Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum, Grades K-13: A Handbook for Teachers*, author James Moffett writes:

> Children, of course, love to hear and tell stories, but we seldom think about why they do. My own theory is that storying is a child's way of thinking about nameless inner things, and that his thinking differs from ours mainly in the categories he establishes and in the symbolic ways he names them, not in the basic processes of logic. He is unable to acknowledge and designate his subjective categories of experience, and he does not yet possess either the vocabulary or the linguistic structures to classify and postulate *explicitly*. Nevertheless, through stories, he manipulates classes and formulates propositions . . . .All adults have to do is recognize the function of (the children's) fun, and honor stories as a genuine mode of thought (1).

Accepting stories as a *bona fide* educational activity is a basic tenet of the modern storyteller (Williams and Maier, 1981). But there is little documented evidence that storytelling, no matter how inviting to the child, has any particular effect or educational value. In elementary schools, storytelling may be part of the weekly visit to the library. Or a school might hire a visiting storyteller as part of an enrichment program. In any case, it is unusual to find a regular classroom teacher well-versed and experienced in the art of storytelling. Even more rare is the teacher who begins or ends the school day with a story hour, highlighting it for a special and memorable effect. In fact, the very word "storytelling" is vague, and the concept requires some demystifying.

What is "storytelling" today? How has it evolved into an art now being reintroduced into the modern classroom? This country's history of storytelling to children is a fascinating one. American storytelling has a unique place in our common heritage, a slice of the American pie worth noting.

"Storytelling" in 1982 is not the original tribal or folk art, but a modern hybrid, an adaptation to a highly organized and bureaucratic society. An overview of "traditional" storytelling shows an early and important shift. At the turn of the century in the U.S., the storyteller's art was deliberately revived for child audiences (Alvery, 1974). Until late in the nineteenth century, storytelling was primarily an oral tradition, with stories generally told by adults to adults. But with technology, this exchange of tall tale and gossip rapidly was replaced by magazines, newspapers and books. Then storytelling became an activity to pursue with children, coinciding historically with "The Discovery of the Child," so-called by social commentators of the time (Key, 1909).

Organized activities for "the child" became the professional endeavors of the great American institutions for the young established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the Y.M.C.A. in 1851 and the Y.W.C.A. in 1866; the Playground and Recreational Association of America in 1906; the Boy Scouts in 1910; the Girl Scouts and the Campfire Girls in 1912. The kindergarten movement in the United States with its European models took hold in the solidly established public education system during the 1890s. Last but not least in the development of storytelling for children, the American Library Association (founded in 1876) established a separate section for work with children in 1900.

With dedication, each professional group sought to instill codes of ethics and exposure to culture within its young membership. All these groups used storytelling as a way to hand down traditional values in an entertaining and inspirational way—from the Bible story to the campfire story, from the children gathering around a visiting storyteller in the playground to the Story Hour in kindergartens and public libraries' children's rooms.

Soon books and articles for each professional group appeared on the technique of telling children stories. It is interesting to note that the first published manual on storytelling was written by a teacher-turned-storyteller and was geared to the elementary classroom teacher. In this landmark publication, *How to Tell Stories to Children* (1905), author Sara Cone Bryant relates her experiences in the New York City schools: "Storytelling has a real mission to perform in setting free the natural creative expression of children and vitalizing the general atmosphere of the school" (2).

Other books, now classics, followed Bryant's first "mission." During the first half of this century, proponents of storytelling for children sought to define the art and its purpose. Said Marie Shedlock, a French-born English educator and one of the most influential advocates of storytelling for children: "Storytelling is almost the oldest art in the world—the first conscious form of literary communication" (3). Shedlock's book, *The Art of the Story-Teller* (1915), followed Bryant's and was aimed at the American classroom teacher. The greatest enthusiasts for her message, however, were the children's librarians, who were strongly affected by Shedlock's personal charisma during her tour of U.S. libraries. Inspired and intrigued by story hour performances, the children's librarians not only conducted story hours in the library, but also visited schools, playgrounds, and settlement houses to display the art and enjoy the enthusiastic response from their young audiences.

Decades later, Ruth Sawyer, a librarian who was a quiet but vivid storyteller, shared her insights into the art and defined it as follows:

> Storytelling is a folk art . . . . All folk arts have grown out of the primal urge to give tongue to what has been seen, heard, experienced. They have been motivated by simple, direct folk-emotions, by imagination; they have been shaped by folk-wisdom . . . . To be a good storyteller one must be gloriously alive (4).

Shedlock and Sawyer captivated and shaped the storytelling art, largely because they were so appealing and effective in holding an audience. The cultural motivation for telling stories, noted educator Sara Innis Fenwick, was this:

> (Storytelling) is also a sharing which is a link joining the storyteller and the audience with peoples of the past and with peoples living in all parts of the world. It is a medium of communication with the richest possibilities for sharing traditional literature (5).

The definitions of this era took for granted that the *stories* were folk tales, authentic stories from the worldwide oral tradition made available in print in the nineteenth and twentieth century collections by the folklorists. And as the general discourses of the storytelling advocates solidified into print, the oral tradition became not just a worthy endeavor, but almost an institution. The naturalness of the "folk" art became crisp and stiff with purpose, something like a starched white shirt, suitable for wearing only to Sunday School. The rubrics for performing storytelling were written with the same authority. The proper principles for telling stories to children usually were given in a serious tone and held up the highest standards. Here are examples of recommended storytelling technique in two classic manuals:

> The story should be recreated each time it is told; it should come to each listener as a living experience; it should hold the immediacy of something that is just happening (6).

> The art of telling stories is, in truth, much more difficult than acting a part on the stage . . . . The special training for the story-teller should consist not only in the training of the voice and choice of language, but above all in power of delicate suggestion . . . . the story-teller has to present these (details of story) to the . . . delicate organism of the "inner eye" (7).

Summarizing the literature of this period, Rose L. Abernethy writes: "The storyteller, then, has been referred to as being a 'dramatic' interpreter, an impersonator, the 'instrument' through which the story unfolds, and as an observer" (8).

These many performing roles were to be achieved, it was suggested, while telling a folk tale that generally came from an unfamiliar time and culture with word-for-word accuracy.

Typically, the traditional storyteller for children in the first half of this century learned stories from a folk tale collection verbatim, then told them aloud with no dramatic devices but the human voice and a profound inner concentration. In this way, the teller maintained the purity of the art and story text. The usual format for performance was the Story Hour, most often held in the children's room of the public library. What soon disappeared was the spontaneous, natural quality of the folk art itself.

Storytelling began to seem difficult. Story presentation often was self-conscious and required lengthy preparations. Even with a perfectly memorized story delivery, the teller had meager professional confidence in having accomplished the "art" of storytelling, in having been, as Ruth Sawyer stated was necessary, "gloriously alive."

The 1960s and '70s ushered in a cultural revolution that inciuded grassroots storytellers, who told all kinds of tales to people of all ages. Some stories they simply make up, some they learn intact from books, some they adapt, some they remember from life experiences, some they learn from each other. With the state of the art in the flux of a new and lively rebirth, storytelling has become almost more puzzling as a cultural phenomenon. But what the newly resurging folk art means for work with children is a more natural approach.

The storyteller need not perform so much as simply relate the events of a story in the style of his or her own personality. Ad libs are allowed, as are fresh nuances, changing details, differing emphases each time the tale is told. The oral tradition is returning to the original story form: spoken, not printed. With individual interpretation permitted, learning a story no longer requires laborious word-for-word memorization.

Classroom teachers, then, who tell stories naturally to their classes year 'round are recreating the atmosphere of an age-old tradition, one that has become an American institution of sorts in the twentieth century. But however old and institutional the art may have become, once the stories start, they hold young audiences immediately and deeply. Alert faces fix on their storyteller teacher, wide-eyed, still, listening. The children are spectators to the invisible events of the story and see the events in their own imaginations as the spoken word paints "mind pictures." As the students make the story real through visualizing, they simultaneously are being introduced to the interpretive use of language, a use that seems to help children develop a "sense of story" (Applebee, 1978).

Storytelling as an art form is becoming more freely expressive. The loosening of the art coincides with current discussions among educators on the teaching role of stories for children. Stories are seen as the most obviously natural way to both introduce and record differences in language use.

Recent language studies in the English-speaking world have brought attention to the distinct uses of language. British educator and author James Britton has made a distinction between two fundamentally different ways we use language: as a *participant* whose language is a tool of exchange, and as a *spectator* whose language helps us create and interpret experiences (Britton, 1970). The participant role includes all exchange of objective information, just the facts. The spectator role includes all the ways of interpreting and representing life experiences—from over-the-fence gossip to childhood stories to the most sophisticated literary art form.

"When we chat of experiences and gossip, and when we create poetry, drama and story, and when we daydream and fantasize, we are using language in the spectator role" (9). The child's "sense of story," or how the child structures and interprets the events of his world through

storytelling, is an example of the spectator role in language use. In a major 1978 study, Arthur Applebee analyzed the content of stories generated by children age two to seventeen. He found the structure in language, metaphor, plot and characterization became more complex in every measure with age, and that a child's "sense of story" was a way of structuring the everyday world:

> The patterns of meaning (the children) find are primarily socially determined—rules of language, thought, and behavior that are transmitted by a range of social structures, stories among many others . . . . Part of the usefulness of stories is that through them we can explore the limits without losing the game (10).

Though a "sense of story" seems to help the child adapt to the environment by giving him the clues of language structure and predictability of outcome, there also is a direct correlation between sense of story, reading comprehension and writing ability. An exploratory study to determine the extent of the correlation (Brown, 1977) found that students who were better able to retell a fairytale in an oral interview also were achieving at higher levels of reading comprehension and writing language with story features. Some concluding remarks about this study suggest crucial activities:

> It may be true, then, that the *extent* of a child's sense of story—inasmuch as it includes facility in the language of story—influences at the very least the reader's prediction of syntax, thus affecting the gaining of meaning, fluency and pleasure in reading. It may be true, too, that the *extent* of the child's sense of story influences comprehension (comprehension being defined as the ability to retell a story read) . . .
>
> The most obvious source for the child's developing sense of story are stories themselves. Listening to stories being told or read aloud throughout the elementary school must be helpful and seems crucial to reading and writing growth . . .
>
> Children should be immersed in stories so as to foster the growth of sense of story. And as the latter includes the language of story and the logic generally associated with stories, then children's reading comprehension may be

improved as may ability in the prediction of syntax and meaning (11).

So storytelling, a folk art that echoes ages past, is filled with lively possibilities. For children it might provide important skill-building steps in thought and language development. And with the art itself becoming increasingly natural, teachers might take ease in knowing that learning can occur in an atmosphere of delight: storytime.

The Word Weaving Program

In light of the renewed interest in storytelling, the Zellerbach Family Fund awarded a three-year grant in 1979 to design an experimental storytelling program. The idea was to develop a program for the primary grades (K-3) and to teach it to teachers, who then would implement it in their classrooms. The design took the form of a workbook (*Word Weaving, A Storytelling Workbook*, 1980); the instruction took the form of workshops and classroom demonstrations.

During the first year of the grant, the workbook was assembled and simultaneously field-tested in two San Francisco public schools whose student population included a wide range of abilities and ethnic backgrounds. The appeal of various stories and story activities were tested at the intended grade levels.

The workbook provides stories arranged in four lists, from easy to more difficult, that roughly correspond to the four grades from kindergarten through third grade. It also contains several chapters describing the history, technique and use of storytelling. Similar to other introductory books on storytelling, it combines method and materials. Different from all other published manuals, however, it arranges the story material in a progressive order that suggests graded difficulty and a continuous program of activity. It is, in effect, a storytelling curriculum for the first four primary grades.

Storytelling in the Word Weaving program includes the following stories or content:

1. Folk tales learned word for word from a printed version
2. Literary tales learned word for word
3. Adaptations or retellings of folk tales or literary tales
4. Original stories made up by the teller
5. True stories recollected by the teller

In the program, all stories are simply told to the class without a book in evidence. The chief dramatic devices are the human voice and eye contact with the group. The major storytelling technique is to *see it happening* as it

is told, and to "speak the words of the story, making the sound (of your words) convey the picture you have in your mind" (12).

The published Word Weaving text was used in teacher workshops in San Francisco and Contra Costa counties. Teachers began to tell stories to their classes and found a new professional ability. As the project gained momentum, its Advisory Board became interested in documenting the effects of the program.

The Pittsburg Study

Little research has focused on how a storytelling program affects students. Amato, et al. (1973) compared the effects of a storytelling program, a creative dramatics program, and a control condition on reading interest, achievement, and other variables. Their results suggested that storytelling may positively affect self image, empathy, and creativity. The activities were done as part of a library program, however, so the results cannot easily be generalized to similar programs in classroom settings. Delano (1977), investigating the effects of daily reading aloud to Title I children, found benefits to vocabulary development, but the program included only stories read aloud, not stories that were told to the children.

Pickert and Chase (1978) suggest that having a child retell a story provides a better measure of language abilities than general observation, and also is better for measuring comprehension than post-story questions. Several researchers have used story retelling in their investigations: Milgrim, et al. (1971) used it to compare advantaged and disadvantaged youngsters' language use; Mandler, et al. (1980) studied cross-cultural differences in recall; Glenn (1980) investigated the effects of story organization on recall.

Other researchers have been concerned with enhancing recall of stories in various ways. Dunham and Levin (1979) studied the effects of pre-story activities on recall, and several researchers looked at how recall is affected by different kinds of story presentation, such as live, videotaped, and audiotaped (Blank and Frank, 1971; Whetstone and Friedlander, 1974; Campbell and Campbell, 1976).

The results of these studies have little relevance to the issues of how a continuing program of storytelling affects language and recall, since in each study only one story on a single occasion was used as a stimulus. Also, the definition of "story" varied considerably in these studies. In some the "story" was a carefully constructed set of statements, limited by the questions being investigated, while in others the "story" was a recognizable tale, offered for both the listeners' enjoyment and the study's purposes. Sometimes the story was read aloud, and sometimes it was told without a printed script, differences that reflect the disagreement over what constitutes a storytelling situation. Overall, the existing research on stories

and listeners' responses to stories does not address the question of how stories told frequently (not read aloud) may affect listeners.

Purpose of the Study

Experience with Word Weaving techniques had suggested that regular and frequent storytelling enhances children's oral language development, use of imagination, and ability to remember what they hear. This study set out to investigate and document the effects of a full-year program of Word Weaving on these abilities in kindergarten and first grade students.

The Pittsburg School District

The Word Weaving Advisory Board sought a community whose children had significant educational needs; the Pittsburg, California school district was chosen as a valuable place to document the effects of storytelling.

Pittsburg (pop. 33,034) is a unique city: It is industrial for it surrounds a steel mill; it is suburban for it is surrounded by the golden, rolling hills of San Francisco East Bay commuter communities. It has a multi-ethnic population, federally subsidized school programs, and the lowest reading scores in Contra Costa County. For the purposes of this study, Pittsburg was appealing because it contains all the educational problems of a big city with the features of a small town.

In spring 1981, the Word Weaving program was introduced to a group of elementary school teachers. The teachers, who voluntarily enrolled in the program, received a copy of the workbook and attended four workshop sessions. They also saw a storytelling demonstration in their own classroom and were observed telling a story to their class. The teachers were encouraged to use the stories in the workbook as well as any others they might select to tell. Of course, their styles varied, but overall, each participating teacher held to the traditional way of storytelling as presented in the workbook.

Research Hypotheses

Six research hypotheses guided the study:

1. Children exposed to Word Weaving (Word Weaving children) will demonstrate greater fluency when retelling stories than comparable children who are not exposed to Word Weaving (controls).

2. Word Weaving children will use a more varied vocabulary when retelling stories than will controls.

3. Word Weaving children will use more descriptive words when retelling stories than will controls.

4. Word Weaving children will retell stories more animatedly than will controls.

5. Word Weaving children will demonstrate greater fluency when telling their own stories than will controls.

6. Word Weaving children will use more imagination when telling their own stories than will controls.

Procedures

At the beginning of the 1981-82 school year, thirteen experimental subjects were selected at random from the kindergarten and first grade classes of teachers identified as users of Word Weaving. They had participated in the Word Weaving workshops, had practiced storytelling during part of the previous school year, and had decided to include Word Weaving in their regular programs during the year this study was conducted. These teachers were identified by using the Levels of Use interview procedures (Loucks, et al, 1975).

Thirteen control subjects were randomly selected from the kindergarten and third grade classes of teachers who neither had participated in the Word Weaving workshops nor used storytelling in their programs. School administrators helped identify control teachers who were selected because they were comparable to experimental teachers except in their use of Word Weaving. The children were unaware of their status as experimental or control subjects, and the teachers were unaware of the nature of the research hypotheses.

The same procedures were used to test all subjects in October and again in May. The director of the Word Weaving workshops, who made regular visits to the schools, went to each classroom that contained students selected for the study and told a story to the whole class. After the story, the students were given drawing or other non-verbal activities while the selected children were taken aside, one by one, and asked to retell the story. When each finished retelling, he or she then was asked to make up a new story that told what happened to the same characters after the original story ended. Responses to both tasks were taped and then transcribed for analysis.

Materials

Both stories used in the study were episodic, cumulative tales. The story told in October was "The Mitten," a Ukranian folk tale collected by E. Rachev and retold by Alvin Tresselt (New York: Lothrop, Lee and

Shepard, 1964). In it, nine different animals—one after another—take refuge in a boy's lost mitten until, finally, it tears apart, the boy returns home, and his grandmother knits him a new pair of mittens.

"The Squeaky Door," told in May, is a retelling of the Puerto Rican folk tale that New York storyteller Laura Simms told at the October 1981 festival of the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling. Based on a boy's bedtime fear of a noisy door, the characters include the boy, his grandmother, and, again, nine animals. To soothe the boy's fears, grandmother places the animals in the bed, one after the other, until the bed breaks, the house falls apart, and the family moves to a new home—one with no squeaky door.

In both stories, key episodes are repeated as each animal is introduced, and the teller used dialogue among the characters and appropriate sound effects.

Measures and Data Analysis

From the children's retelling of the story and their new stories, four measures of language usage were obtained: a count of the total number of words used (fluency), a count of the number of different words used (vocabulary), a count of the number of different adjectives and adverbs used (descriptive language), and a count of the number of story elements mentioned (recall). The storyteller and the evaluator had agreed which key events to consider story elements. To assess children's abilities to animate a story, a count also was taken of the number of dialogue statements and sound effects.

Two measures were used to assess the children's ability to tell a new story: a count of the total number of words in each new story (fluency) and a count of new story elements, which were characters or events not part of the original story (use of imagination).

An analysis of variance was used to compare experimental and control group performance in fall and spring on the language variables, the recall variable, and the dialogue/sound effects variable. A separate t-test analysis was used to compare the total number of words and the new story elements children introduced into their new stories.

Results

Retelling data: The analysis of variance of the retelling data suggested that both groups retold stories equally well overall; there were no main effect differences between the experimental and control groups ($F_{1,24} = 0.45$ $p > .50$). There was a significant test occasion main effect

($F_{1,24} = 20.63$ $p < .01$) but not a significant test occasion x group interaction ($F_{1,24} = 0.19$ $p > .19$), suggesting that both groups improved significantly and equally overall from the beginning of the year to the end. There were no significant differences between experimental and control groups on the language, recall, or dialogue/sound effects variables either in the spring or the fall. The means and standard deviation for these variables are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations (S.D.) of Six Dependent Variables Based on Children's Retelling of the Story.

	Experimental		Control	
	Mean	**S.D.**	**Mean**	**S.D.**
Total Words (Fall)	89.85	87.64	71.62	75.59
Total Words (Spring)	309.15	261.05	266.00	252.18
Total Different Words (Fall)	39.62	32.79	31.62	24.06
Total Different Words (Spring)	65.38	29.14	51.62	30.42
Different Adjectives (Fall)	5.77	5.04	4.77	4.26
Different Adjectives (Spring)	8.62	4.19	5.77	3.11
Different Adverbs (Fall)	4.92	4.94	3.77	3.75
Different Adverbs (Spring)	7.08	5.51	5.62	4.35
Recalled Story Elements (Fall)	5.69	5.17	5.77	3.79
Recalled Story Elements (Spring)	9.31	4.40	8.00	4.08
Dialogue/Sound Effects (Fall)	.54	.97	.77	2.77
Dialogue/Sound Effects (Spring)	25.92	36.84	13.92	15.60

N = 26

New story data: Although the groups did not differ significantly in the fall on either total number of words in their new stories or on the number of new story elements included, the experimental group was significantly better than the control group on both measures in the spring, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations (S.D.) of Two Dependent Variables Based on Children's New Stories.

	Experimental		Control	
	Mean	**S.D.**	**Mean**	**S.D.**
Total Words (Fall)	27.00	30.88	16.08	16.76
			(t_{24}=1.04 not significant)	
Total Words (Spring)	29.62	32.33	9.00	8.30
			(t_{24}=2.18 p< .05)	
New Story Elements (Fall)	1.23	2.20	.30	.63
			(t_{24}=1.45 not significant)	
New Story Elements (Spring)	1.46	1.66	.15	.55
			(t_{24}=2.69 p< .01)	

N = 26

Discussion

The results from the new story data suggest that Word Weaving has a positive effect on children's ability to compose new stories based on stories they have heard. The two groups at first were equally fluent when telling a new story. But by the end of the year, the experimental group told longer stories than they did earlier and also significantly outperformed the control group. By spring, the controls, on the other hand, not only told shorter stories than the experimental group, but also told shorter stories than they had earlier.

In spring the Word Weaving children generally seemed eager to continue the story, and many seemed to be thinking carefully about what might happen next to the story characters. The controls seemed indifferent to the request to continue the story, many simply repeating the same parts of the story they already had mentioned. These findings and observations of children suggest that Word Weaving encourages fluency when students tell their own stories.

As for the number of new story elements used in their new stories, the two groups also did not differ significantly at first. However, by spring the experimental group had improved its performance while the control group included fewer new elements than it had earlier; the difference between groups was significant.

Asked to tell what happened next, the control children typically responded with "Probably the same thing," or "I don't know—she didn't

say." The Word Weaving children, however, typically added new, imaginative ideas to their continuations of the story. One child had the grandmother in "The Squeaky Door" return all the animals and get her money back. Another described the new house the family moved to, mentioning the bricks and cement of which the house was made. Yet another banished all the animals to outside the house when the family moved.

The new ideas were neither extensive nor elaborate, but the children clearly were able to continue the story and do so without just repeating the same things they already had heard. These findings are particularly interesting in that the Word Weaving teachers did not ask or expect their students to tell stories. Thus, the results cannot be explained by simply attributing Word Weaving children's better performance to regular practice. The Word Weaving teachers, however, did report that their students became enthusiastic about stories and, on occasion, spontaneously asked to tell their own stories. Word Weaving appears to stimulate children's interest in telling stories and encourages use of imagination when they make up their own stories.

Analysis of the retelling data revealed no significant differences between the experimental and control groups on any of the dependent variables. But before drawing conclusions on these findings, several points need to be considered.

First, the Word Weaving children did show greater gains on all measures than the controls (Table 1). Both groups averaged less than one dialogue/sound effects statement in their first responses, while in the spring the Word Weaving children had almost twice as many of these statements (25.92) as the controls (13.92). The Word Weaving children also improved to a greater extent than the controls in fluency, vocabulary, and recall.

These consistently better scores at the end of the year, though not statistically significant, should not be dismissed. The number of children in the sample was rather small (thirteen subjects in each group), and the variability within each group was considerable (see the standard deviations in Table 1). With a larger number of subjects, differences between groups, such as those obtained here, might be statistically significant. The greater improvement of the Word Weaving children from fall to spring at least suggests that Word Weaving may stimulate children's ability to retell a story fluently, with good use of vocabulary, and in a lively, animated way. Further studies using more subjects could clarify these findings.

Another point to consider is the teachers' experience using Word Weaving. All the Word Weaving teachers previously had used the storytelling program regularly, but the study coincided with their first full year of use. Although they were doing an enthusiastic and solid job of storytelling, all felt they still could improve their abilities as storytellers

and, with more experience, could do an even better job of using the techniques. The teachers wanted to expand their repertoire of stories, develop improved telling styles, and increase the number and type of story-related activities in their programs. It certainly is likely that after several years of experience, a teacher could use the program more effectively than in the first year. This, in turn, would enhance the program's effects on children's ability to retell stories they hear.

It also is possible that the full benefits of storytelling are noticeable only after several years of exposure to a program such as Word Weaving. The Word Weaving children in this study told modestly longer and more imaginative new stories than the controls and showed better, if not significant, performance in retelling a story after only a year of the Word Weaving program. After three or four years of regular, frequent story-telling, such differences might be more pronounced. The full effects of a storytelling program may be gradual and cumulative, rather than dramatic and immediate.

Teachers' comments about Word Weaving suggest that the program benefits children in several ways not measured in this study. Having taught for many years without using a focused, planned program of storytelling, these teachers noted that the frequent story times greatly helped children learn to listen attentively. Informal observation of the groups in this study confirmed that claim.

At the beginning of the year, all classes seemed equally attentive to the first test story; their attention was typical of what would be expected for children of this age at the start of the school year. In the spring, however, the Word Weaving classes as a whole were remarkably attentive during the telling of the test story. They watched the storyteller with very little restlessness and even joined eagerly in the telling, imitating animal sounds and repeating dialogue with the storyteller. Some children predicted aloud which animal would appear next.

The control classes were noticeably less attentive. Many children looked away from the storyteller after only a few minutes and engaged other children in irrelevant conversation. Only a few children joined in the telling or seemed interested in the story. Although no formal measures of attentiveness were taken, the differences between classes were marked and seemed a direct result of Word Weaving classes' greater experience with storytimes and the appropriate degree of attention during those times.

Some Word Weaving teachers noted that their students also were developing what could be considered a "sense of story" (Applebee, 1978). During the year, for example, the Word Weaving students remembered stories from one occasion to the next, and spontaneously compared characters in different stories. The children's comments suggested that they were forming concepts about typical story characters, such as witches or wolves. Applebee (1978) noted this same phenomenon of recognition of

character types. This behavior certainly could be considered a first step in understanding story structure and techniques of characterization, a foundation that can benefit children as they are introduced to a more extensive world of literature in later years (Brown, 1977). It also is possible that early exposure to oral stories generates interest in reading: Hearing stories frequently may lead children to seek other sources of stories, such as books or magazines.

Another observation of the Word Weaving teachers was that even when the children did not discuss the stories, their interest and comprehension were revealed in non-verbal ways. Given a chance to draw or paint following a story, the children's pictures often revealed detailed recall of story events and characters. Many also were able to act out parts of stories with interest and animation. The Word Weaving visualizing exercises sometimes used by the teachers seemed to aid story comprehension and, according to one teacher, helped children visualize and understand concepts in other curriculum areas as well. For instance, practice in visualizing stories seemed to help one group visualize seed germination in a science lesson.

Finally, some teachers claimed that Word Weaving particularly benefited the most reticent children in class. These students, reluctant to talk on other occasions, were stimulated to talk about the stories or join in the telling with the rest of the class. Children from other cultures, for whom English was a second language, also seemed to benefit from story times, according to the teachers. The stories gave these children additional exposure to English in a non-threatening way, and they reportedly were as attentive and interested in the stories as the rest of the class.

Overall, Word Weaving shows promise as a school-based storytelling program. The teachers never considered it a novelty, something worth trying out once in a while. They saw storytime as a valuable and enjoyable regular feature of their instructional programs, and they reported seeing clear benefits to their students through the use of stories. The results of the study also point to several beneficial features of the program, particularly in enhancing children's ability to tell new stories with fluency and imagination.

Suggestions for Further Research

The findings of this study and the comments of the teachers who used Word Weaving suggest that further research on the effects of storytelling would be valuable. Possible directions for additional research included:

1. Explore the effects of a Word Weaving program, using teachers with several years' experience with the techniques.
2. Investigate the effects of several years' exposure to Word Weaving.
3. Assess the effects of Word Weaving on students' interest in reading, perhaps by looking at the number and type of books children read while participating in the Word Weaving program.
4. Explore the effects of Word Weaving on other variables, not measured here—the effects of storytelling on children's "sense of story" (Applebee, 1978), their self esteem, or their general creativity, for example.
5. Assess the effects of Word Weaving through other measures of language ability, recall, or ability to animate a story in retelling. For instance, story recall and comprehension might be measured in non-verbal ways, such as through drawing or story enactment.
6. Since story organization—episodic vs. logical—affect recall (Glenn, 1980), use other types of stories as stimuli to test children's ability to retell a story after exposure to the Word Weaving program.
7. Investigate the effects of Word Weaving on oral English acquisition among students for whom English is a second language, particularly when using folk literature from the students' ethnic backgrounds.

Summary

Storytelling, long a significant part of our culture, particularly delights children. While many people believe that telling stories requires substantial efforts and skills, recent experience suggests that anyone interested can learn the art of telling a good tale. Teachers especially can become excellent storytellers and can enhance their instructional programs with folk tales, modern stories, and personal experiences told as stories.

Before the Word Weaving workshops, the teachers who participated in this study did not think of themselves as storytellers and were uncertain about their ability to learn the art. With the help of the workshops and with some practice, however, they soon became confident of their abilities and the enjoyment and benefits they could offer their students.

Regular use of Word Weaving techniques also improves children's fluency and imagination when they create a story based on one they hear, and may help them remember and retell stories. The teachers who used Word Weaving in this study unanimously attested to storytelling's benefits on children's oral language development, comprehension, and fundamental understanding of story.

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3. Marie L. Shedlock, *The Art of the Story-Teller* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1915), p. xvii.

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